

North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame

established May 18, 1996

2008 Induction Ceremony
October 19, 2008



Weymouth Center for the Arts & Humanities
Southern Pines, North Carolina

North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame



2008 Inductees

JAMES APPLEWHITE

WILLIAM S. POWELL

LEE SMITH

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame

INDUCTION CEREMONY

Sunday, October 19, 2008

WELCOME

Marshall Berg

President, Weymouth Center for the Arts & Humanities

Ed Southern

Executive Director, North Carolina Writers' Network

J. Peder Zane

Master of Ceremonies

INDUCTION

JAMES APPLEWHITE

Presented by Rebecca Godwin

Reading by Jaki Shelton Green

WILLIAM S. POWELL

Presented by Jerry Cashion

Reading by Jay Mazzocchi

LEE SMITH

Presented by Lucinda MacKethan

Reading by Jill McCorkle

RECOGNITION OF AWARD'S ARTIST

Shelley Crisp

Executive Director, North Carolina Humanities Council

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Reception to follow

FOREWORD

WEYMOUTH, WRITERS AND WORDS

It is a sturdy house, well over 100 years old now and still rising among glossy magnolias and tall pines which lean into the Carolina wind. Its elegance is understated, with none of the ostentation one might expect of a twenty-room house. Weymouth served the Boyd family well for many years; since 1977 its service has expanded beyond family to community, its mission marked by the good taste which distinguishes its architectural design.

During the 1890s, James Boyd, a steel and railroad magnate, purchased 1,200 acres in Southern Pines and built a home. He christened this new estate "Weymouth," after a town he had visited in England. Set amidst a magnificent stand of virgin long-leaf pines, it served as a country manor where his grandson and namesake, James, often came as a boy to repair frail health and explore the imposing pine forest and surrounding countryside.

Later young James went to Princeton and then on to Cambridge to earn a master's degree. Rejected by the National Guard for health reasons, James went to work for Doubleday Page Company in New York in 1916. The following year he and his new bride, the former Katharine Lamont, spent their honeymoon in the house, but by spring 1918 he did receive a commission and went to serve in the Army Ambulance Service in Italy until 1919 when he was discharged because of his health. Returning to Weymouth, which by now he co-owned with his brother, Jackson, he and Katharine began redesigning the house. They moved part of the original house across Connecticut Avenue to become part of Jackson's new home, now known as the Campbell House. To the remaining structure, they added a second story and two wings, enlarging the Georgian-style house to 9,000 square feet.

James Boyd, now 34 years old, left the management of the family business to his brother while he pursued the dream which had begun when he was editor of his high school newspaper: to become a writer. Boyd's biographer, David Whisnant, observes that Boyd chose to live in Southern Pines because this site "seemed to offer the best conditions for beginning [a literary career]—a reasonable physical comfort, freedom from distractions, and a mild climate...and an opportunity to affirm the tangible values of American life." One of the earliest visitors to the newly-enlarged home was British novelist and playwright John Galsworthy, who, after reading Boyd's stories, encouraged him to try a novel, then, on a trip to New York, urged

publishers to “keep an eye on James Boyd.” In 1925, Scribner’s published Boyd’s first novel, *Drums*. It won immediate attention, not only for its story but for its realism—the result of Boyd’s extensive and meticulous research.

Boyd went on to write more novels, a number of short stories and a collection of poetry. In 1941, he expanded his career by purchasing and editing the Southern Pines *Pilot*. Meanwhile, his home became a welcome retreat for many of the best writers of the day: Thomas Wolfe, E. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Laurence Stallings, Sherwood Anderson, and Paul Green, as well as his editor, the legendary Maxwell Perkins, and his illustrator, N.C. Wyeth. His daughter, Nancy Sokoloff, once recalled that “During my father’s lifetime there were no ‘writers’ colonies.’ Our living room and that of Paul and Elizabeth Green served as settings for serious work and conversations about Southern writing and its future.”

The serious conversations went beyond literature. During World War II, Boyd organized and served as the National Chairman of the Free Company of Players, a group of writers who were concerned that constitutional rights might be compromised during the frenzy of wartime. Among the writers joining him in writing plays for broadcast over national radio were Orson Welles, Paul Green, Archibald MacLeish, and Stephen Vincent Benet.

In 1944, after James Boyd’s untimely death, Katharine continued living at Weymouth and publishing *The Pilot*. She and her children donated 400 pine-filled acres to the state for development into the Weymouth Woods Nature Preserve. When she died in 1974, she left the house, remaining land and forest to Sandhills Community College. But, unable to effeciently use the property, the College put it on the market. Fearful that this treasure would be demolished by developers, two friends of the Boyds undertook the task of saving it. Elizabeth Stevenson (Buffie) Ives organized Friends of Weymouth; Sam Ragan, then publisher and editor of *The Pilot*, rallied support from the State of North Carolina, the Nature Conservancy, the Sierra Club, the North Carolina Writers’ Conference, and the North Carolina Poetry Society. The first person Ragan approached, playwright Paul Green, made the first donation: \$1,000. Later, Moore County resident Bob Drummond provided a major boost with an initial contribution of \$20,000 and a later donation of an equal amount.

On February 15, 1977, Friends of Weymouth, Inc. was incorporated and the house, surrounded by twenty-two acres, has flourished as a full-fledged cultural center ever since. College groups and various arts groups hold meetings and retreats here. The great room and back lawn host concerts by chamber music groups and such notables as Doc Watson and lectures by speakers as varied as social critic Tom Wolfe and sociologist John Shelton Reed. There have also been frequent readings by North Carolina writers such as Clyde Edgerton, Kaye Gibbons and Shelby Stephenson, as well as an annual Sam Ragan Poetry Festival the 2nd Saturday in March.

In addition to formal programs, Weymouth has hosted one of former North Carolina Poet Laureate Sam Ragan's favorite projects: residencies offering writers, artists and composers stays of up to two weeks to pursue their art in James Boyd's hospitable home. Poet and novelist Guy Owen was the first writer-in-residence, and, just a few months before his death in 1981, he also made his last public reading at Weymouth. Since 1979, hundreds of writers and artists have held residencies here. Many testify that their art has flourished on this site; some even credit the hovering spirit of James Boyd and perhaps those of his many literary guests with providing additional creative impetus.

It is fitting that Weymouth, where James Boyd and hundreds of other writers have found congenial conditions for their work, is the site of the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame. It is also fitting that the space set aside for this distinction is Boyd's upstairs study, where James did his own writing, often by dictating to a stenographer as he paced back and forth, taking on the voices of his characters. Perhaps the spirits of those who are honored here will join the chorus of literary masters whose influence echoes through the halls and across the grounds of Weymouth.

SALLY BUCKNER
RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

INTRODUCTION

*And down the centuries that wait ahead there'll be some whisper of our name,
some mention and devotion to the dream that brought us here.*

— *The Lost Colony* by Paul Green

From its earliest days, North Carolina has been blessed with the “mention and devotion” of a great host of writers living and working in the state. A rich literary heritage is a legacy cherished by all North Carolinians.

The North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame is established as a perpetual opportunity to remember, honor and celebrate that heritage. By marking the contribution of its literary giants of every generation, it will support and encourage the further flourishing of excellent literature in the state.

The North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame was the dream of a generation of the state’s most dedicated cultural leaders, mobilized by Sam Ragan, former poet laureate of North Carolina. It was authorized by a Joint Resolution of the General Assembly on July 23, 1993, then formally established by a grant from the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources to the North Carolina Writers’ Network, a literary organization serving writers and readers across the state since 1985.

The Hall of Fame is physically located in a notable shrine of North Carolina writing. The Weymouth Center for the Arts & Humanities in Southern Pines is the former home and workplace of novelist James Boyd and his wife Katharine, a distinguished journalist and patron of the arts. The large room where plaques, pictures, books and other memorabilia of the state’s honored writers are displayed was Boyd’s workroom.

Members of the Hall of Fame are selected by a committee of writers. The goal is to choose widely and inclusively from the great parade of novelists, poets, short story writers, playwrights, journalists and storytellers of all sorts who have called themselves North Carolinians. While the first year honored only those from the past, the Hall of Fame now joins other notable cultural award programs in honoring living writers.

In the 1920s, an editor visiting North Carolina marveled at the literary liveliness of the place where, she said, writers flourished in “an atmosphere of plain living and high thinking that I never experienced before.”

In the spirit of those who over the centuries have graced North Carolina with a literature of such quality, beauty and power, the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame proudly honors writers who have achieved enduring stature in their mention and devotion to their art and to the state.

ROY PARKER, JR.

FAYETTEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

THE LITERARY HALL OF FAME
INDUCTEE AWARD BY NORTH CAROLINA ARTISTS

2008 ARTIST

Carolyn Allen, owner of Tropic Moon Studio, lives in Graham as a lifelong resident of Piedmont North Carolina. She received both her BA and MLS degrees from UNC-Greensboro. As she approached retirement from the Alamance County Public Libraries, she decided to expand on her longtime love of stained glass by learning to make the beautiful designs she has always admired. After one class, she was hooked and has continued taking classes for the past three years. She has produced more than 60 pieces, both as gifts and as custom orders for clients, from the studio in her home.

FEATURED ARTISTS SINCE 1996

- 1996 **Katherine Kubel**. Chapel Hill graphic designer. Gold wooden frame with multiple openings for pictures and text.
- 1997 **Sally Prang**. Chapel Hill ceramic artist. Brightly colored ceramic vase mounted on black stand.
- 1998 **Cathy Kiffney**. Chapel Hill ceramic artist. Ceramic wall plaque with white magnolia and green leaves.
- 2000 **Tom Spleth**. Raleigh potter and ceramist. Garden-tile vertical box sculptures in N.C. colors for the sea, pines and clay.
- 2002 **Ben Owen III**. Seagrove potter. Vases with signature glazes of vibrant reds, jade greens and traditional earth tones.
- 2004 **Jeanette Sheehan**. Southern Pines visual artist. Print of original water color painting of Weymouth.
- 2006 **Janet Resnick**. Chapel Hill potter. Large oval ceramic tray with Weymouth house and gardens motif.

LITERARY HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

1996 – 2008

A.R. AMMONS, *2000*

JAMES APPLEWHITE, *2008*

GERALD BARRAX, *2006*

DORIS BETTS, *2004*

LEGETTE BLYTHE, *2002*

JAMES BOYD, *1996*

FRED CHAPPELL, *2006*

CHARLES W. CHESNUTT, *1996*

JONATHAN DANIELS, *1996*

OLIVE TILFORD DARGAN, *2000*

BURKE DAVIS, *2000*

WILMA DYKEMAN, *1998*

JOHN EHLE, *1997*

INGLIS FLETCHER, *1996*

JOHN HOPE FRANKLIN, *1998*

PAUL GREEN, *1996*

BERNICE KELLY HARRIS, *1996*

GEORGE MOSES HORTON, *1996*

HARRIET ANN JACOBS, *1997*

RANDALL JARRELL, *1996*

GERALD JOHNSON, *1996*

JAMES MCGIRT, *2004*

JOHN CHARLES MCNEILL, *1998*

JOSEPH MITCHELL, *1997*

PAULI MURRAY, *1998*

GUY OWEN, *1996*

FRANCES GRAY PATTON, *1997*

WILLIAM SYDNEY PORTER
(O. HENRY), *1996*

WILLIAM S. POWELL, *2008*

REYNOLDS PRICE, *2002*

SAM RAGAN, *1997*

CHRISTIAN REID, *2002*

GLEN ROUNDS, *2002*

ROBERT RUARK, *2000*

LOUIS RUBIN, *1997*

LEE SMITH, *2008*

ELIZABETH SPENCER, *2002*

ELIZABETH DANIELS SQUIRE, *2006*

THAD STEM, JR., *1996*

RICHARD WALSER, *1996*

MANLY WADE WELLMAN, *1996*

TOM WICKER, *2004*

JONATHAN WILLIAMS, *1998*

THOMAS WOLFE, *1996*

JAMES APPLEWHITE

b. 1935

Les Todd/Duke Photography



Duke University English Professor James W. Applewhite, born in 1935 in the Wilson County town of Stantonburg (population just under 1,000), at the border of Greene County, is a kind of man-between: between Wilson and Greene counties, between town childhood and days at his grandfather's farm, and between a life of thought, of teaching, and a life of action of the sort his father, grandfather, and forefathers back into the early nineteenth century lived in farming there. That life of action is what the poet calls "the mightiness one feels in the past" ("Homeward, under Congregated Cloud," 2007) and what Applewhite's 1989 interviewer learns to

be "the slow, detailed labor, as back-breaking as the cotton labor" that a tobacco farm requires.

And it's the distance between his own family—wife, Janis, and three children, their spouses, and four grandchildren who visit them at home among the hydrangeas, phlox, and white crepe myrtle in Durham County on the banks of the Eno River—and the old ones and cousins down east, "[o]ut of reach of the classical station" ("Road Down Home," 1983). With a lifelong interest in science, especially aviation and astronomy, James Applewhite also senses what it means to be between Earth and its solar system and the rest of the *Cosmos*, the title of Applewhite's twelfth book of poetry, recently finished.

Between who young James was in the early 1940s: a thoughtful child whose father was away at war, a child who contracted rheumatic fever at the age of six and had to spend the next year in bed reading children's books and comics and being read to by his "first literary influence," his school-teacher uncle, Almond Mercer, from *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Odyssey*, and *The Arabian Nights*. Between that time/place and who he is now—a university professor who has been honored in New York with the 1992 American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Jean Stein Award in Poetry, as Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis looked on from the audience. He was also honored by Governor Jim Hunt with The North Carolina Award in Literature in 1995.

What holds together all those “betweens” is this poet’s continuing consciousness of a child’s “experience of waking up in this place with these people, so inexplicably, and the sense of wonderment” that it should be just so (2005 interview with Sylvia Pfeffenberger, Duke Office of News & Communication). James Applewhite, “student” of William Wordsworth and of Wordsworth’s own “teacher,” the philosopher Plato, is now and has been since before 1970 the poet of palpable and impalpable wonders, helping his readers see on many levels.

Applewhite’s Duke Ph.D. dissertation was on Wordsworth, as is his only book-length prose work. In 2006 Applewhite told interviewer Katharine Walton, “As for Wordsworth’s continuing influence [on me and my work]: Like the water that fish swim in; assumed. Wordsworth brought the human quest for meaning down out of the mythological clouds and situated it in the landscape, in recognizable characters, traveling through space and time. Wordsworth brought a sense of purpose and divinity believably into the human journey. He brought the human subject face to face with time and mortality. He created hope out of greatness of imagination, but all within the realistic dimensions of space and time.”

Poet Dave Smith describes Applewhite’s work in the highly regarded *Selected Poems* (Duke University Press, 2005) this way: “It is rugged and refined, classical in decorum and local in idiom, deep in wisdom and clear as water in freshness. It is a compact, luminous etching of a singular imagination working to get down the way it was and is in this place on the planet.”

About the same time, North Carolina Poet Laureate and 2006 Literary Hall of Fame inductee Fred Chappell (Applewhite’s longtime friend and Duke classmate), wrote in the *Raleigh News & Observer* that “The publication of James Applewhite’s *Selected Poems* is a signal event in the history of North Carolina literature. [The work is a] volume of uncommon consistency, a sort of spiritual autobiography less concerned with chronological circumstance than with recurrent themes, moods and motifs. . . . [M]y admiration has rarely dimmed in fifty years of study. When this poetry later gained the approval of such literary luminaries as Donald Justice, John Hollander, James Dickey and others, I did not need to feel vindicated. From the beginning, Applewhite’s lines have borne the stamp of excellence, the signature of the genuine. *Selected Poems* is a landmark [showing] complexity set out with simplicity.”

James Applewhite is an esteemed university teacher and attentive citizen of the world and cosmos—“Tiny and vast, stars swarm,/humming of times to come” (“Looking Up from the Woodland Clearing,” *North Carolina Literary Review*, 2003; and in *A Diary of Altered Light*, Louisiana State University Press, 2006), but he is also a poet of farm, field, forest, and, yes, of ditch—“one field . . ./With grape vine ruin, broom sedge on ditch edge/ Like bronze piano strings. . .”(“My Uncle’s Parsonage,” 1983). He, again like Wordsworth, pays attention to ruins, to unmarked graves, to rivers and

streams. Applewhite has an eye for maples that send their seeds curling out in February and for jonquils that perennially sprout up where a farmhouse is long fallen-in and gone: "I found a broken plate in a heap/that eighty years wrapped with briars./Yet in the weed-scrawled yard, jonquils keep/pushing up the tips of new years" ("The Vanished Farmhouse," *NCLR*, 2003; and in *A Diary of Altered Light*).

And he is not above humor, either, because a few lines before, he notes "a great horned owl in a pine/against twilight. Two others bowing as in fun/seemed strange archaic gentlemen./Cat-eared, they hooted, among needles drained/by dark of green." Thus, just having seen (and said!) the cat-eared gentlemen owls, the jonquils' "tips of new years" a few lines later sound to the reader (and mean) a lot like "ears," too. That is fun. And it reminds the reader of the many ways the creatures, plants, objects, and shapes in nature are related to one another.

Applewhite is admired by British-Trinidadian novelist and essayist V.S. Naipaul, too, who traveled all the way from England to have the man he calls "Jim" Applewhite guide him around eastern North Carolina and help him understand the South before writing *A Turn in the South* (Knopf, 1989). In that book, Naipaul writes that Applewhite sees the world around him closely, like an intelligent "[f]armer, child, and poet." Those three appositives for Jim "c[o]me together in [his] contemplation of the physical circumstances of his childhood, and in his serious, generous talk" (369).

Like Thomas Gray or Thomas Hardy taking a big-city interviewer on a visit to the family graveyard, Applewhite analyzes two scorched-looking wooden markers in his family's graveyard down a grass track, next to a tobacco field: "The iron rails [around the graveyard] were overgrown with weeds and orange trumpet vines," Naipaul writes. "The oldest stone, very nearly indecipherable, had been put up in 1849. Small stones marked children's graves. There were two wooden markers. Jim said, 'Probably heart of pine. What they call "fat lightwood." Possibly a slave. Sometimes slaves were buried with wooden markers.'

"These markers looked scorched. I thought it might have been from age, but Jim said there might have been a fire in the field. The softer wood had worn away around the ridges of the harder grain.

"Across the grass track from the graveyard there was a field of tobacco, the veined, resilient, umbrella-like leaves drooping a little after the weeks of drought. These small fields and rusting old tobacco barns—picturesque when I had first seen them [in the South]—spoke now of great, detailed labor. And in the graveyard in the center of the field it was easy to imagine how confining it would have been in the old days, before roads and motorcars and electricity, and how the country town of Wilson, ten miles away, made a day's journey. . . ."

Applewhite says of the distances he feels between himself and the old tobacco culture of eastern North Carolina he nonetheless loves, that it is:

. . . Closed in by miles
Which sandy roads, pine barrens, swamps, made
A limit to curiosity. The stars' light,
The King James Bible and Wesley's hymns,
Traveled equivalent distances, unquestioned.

"But now there was an easy road to Durham," Naipaul writes, and indeed the poet agrees, telling him that "recently [he has] begun to make [Durham] the subject of his poetry," more than thirty years after going up to Duke as a college freshman. Naipaul concludes his 1988 interview of James Applewhite in a way that helps us now, in 2008, understand the philosophical-psychological-religious reasons for the poet's fine, career-long attention to landscape, vegetative, cultural, and character details: "Out of [Jim's] intense contemplation of the physical world of his childhood . . . and out of separation from that first world of his, [he] had gone beyond the religious faith of his father and grandfather and arrived at a feeling for 'the sanctity of the smallest gestures'" (306).

Applewhite's use of "stars' light" in the excerpt above, shows another interest he has: science. Even as a boy Jim loved science and had many questions, as he tells Naipaul: "[I felt] a duality of worlds as a child and a young man that is probably not at all unique for a person of artistic inclinations, but which was given an exceptional tension by the intensity with which so many in this small-town world defied or opposed those values which were foreign to it—those cultural values that were transmitted from afar. There is a sense of self-subsistence about the South—that it is itself, knows itself, and needs nothing else. . . .

"And I was hungry to have things explained. I remember looking up at the constellations and not knowing the names. . . . Or not knowing the names of trees. I have my telescope now, which I didn't have then.

"Finally, one wanted consciousness, the right to be aware, or to name in language, in harmonious language, or in music—to name things, or else simply to name. Art is a sort of divine uselessness. That's one of the reasons I'm also attracted to tobacco. It's not practical. It's not for any use that's good for anything" (304).

In a 2005 poem, "The Descent," Applewhite writes of a trip back to the eastern towns of Appie and Seven Springs; the speaker is not expecting anything in particular—which, of course, is the writer's best approach to the blank page. Inside a general store, he recalls how it felt as a child to enter such a store—one like Applewhite's grandfather's general store in Stantonburg, where the family name was written in gold letters on the windows. Such a store was "the shelved house/Holding all experience for the mouth," the mouth being the first way children learn and apply consciousness upon their world to make sense of it. Today, the speaker has a cold bottle of ginger ale at the store, and again enjoys the surprise of its bright taste. Applewhite suggests that a poet, "the seeker in language" ("Interstate Highway," *Quartet for Three*

Voices, LSUP, 2002) may follow a map along the interstate and then the road and then a grass track, but the mind goes everywhere “by chance,” alert to discovering through the senses “more than you came for.” After his ginger ale, he stands outside on the covered sidewalk looking back through the pane, his love for these “little towns” mixing with his memories and his mourning for the loss of that early time. One critic writes that Applewhite’s best poems, like “The Descent,” are “sorrowful and true.”

In “The Descent,” the speaker learns that in the 1940s the interiors and the exterior landscapes of the towns down home were his “elementary classes,” the colors and details of which were as “pristine” to him as the bright “Japanese paper umbrellas” sold next door to the general store or his first “box of eight crayons.”

At the end of his Wordsworthian excursion, the speaker gets back in his car and drives off, but not before sensing that “The car you drive is a kind of burial,” a means of falling into the adult world again, a “descent.” Dread is balanced by the positive last line, “You promise yourself to come again,” suggesting more than just a drive back one day. For in the memory such visits come often, come in ways that a poet can learn to control as “experience(s) recollected in tranquility” (William Wordsworth, Preface to the Second Edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800). And if the poem’s title is read as a “descent” from the Piedmont “down” home to the east, it suggests that to the artist, memory can be a scenic highway to innocence, to one’s earliest consciousness of the sensed world. Indeed, James Applewhite has a unique ability to recollect—and relate to us—the nature of his own consciousness, in the decade before he had one of his science questions answered: that coming through a pane of glass and then through a glass of water, “How light would be bent, and wet” (“The Descent”). A line that gives us “more than [we] came for.”

So Applewhite as ably ponders the time-space continuum—the vast curve of time and space out there “aloft,” as one critic puts it, and the possible incineration of our solar system in five billion years as he notes minute changes in leaves, grasses, and flowers from month to month through the earthly year in Wilson and Durham counties. These changes are our earthly clocks of passing time, he notes in a 2006 interview: “Time itself is the great mystery, but though we cannot know time conceptually, we can sometimes see it intuitively, and it creates a beauty we feel, beyond understanding.”

Literary critics who have looked at his twelve volumes of poetry, his scholarly book on Wordsworth, Keats, Poe, Yeats, Eliot, and Roethke, *Seas and Inland Journeys: Landscape and Consciousness from Wordsworth to Roethke* (Georgia, 1985) and other articles, note the many dualities or “echoes” Applewhite’s consciousness and his art have set down in the writing. These paired images and sounds intensify the meaning of each, like the two halves of orchestral cymbals—better together: “Biblical guilt” suggests “guilt”; bibles and concordances, “tomes/Like tombstones” in his uncle’s study, are

“of no earthly use save to the soul.” “Save” as a preposition for “except” is well considered here, and not just for the rhythm and alliteration. In another poem, fluffy “congregated cloud” gathered over a floodplain after a hurricane where the cloud is reflected on the waters like “congregations of Rorschach souls, losses in mist” recalls Methodist congregations joined together to sing and be prayed over for health of mind and body by the speaker’s minister-uncle, himself a cripple who lived in pain with “crook-kneed walk and cane.”

The speaker inherits a fine gold watch on a chain from his uncle; now in Durham, the watch “still ticking in a room/Loops its chain around me,/ Inheritance of thought, goldening air between/Your house that I know but cannot find, and/These streets where I walk, and you are not” (“My Uncle’s Parsonage,” *Ploughshares*, fall 1983). In heightened, radiant, “goldening” air of memory, the speaker—like the watch—is cut off from the mill town where the uncle preached—where “Sick, he visited the sick.” “[M]ethodical/ Methodist,” Rev. Applewhite was “incurably addicted to the alcoholic/ Brakeman’s repentances and relapses,” working tirelessly to save souls down on their luck.

And a reader discovers more pairings that make meaning concisely, excellently—with their own kind of “Method”: tight jet streams run high across the sky with “far thunder” as grassy ditches of standing water reflect blue sky below; collards and beans feed the poor while iced tea in cut-glass stems and turkey sliced at the sideboard feed the townsfolk down home. When imagery is true to life, no polemical lines need apply.

And more: on interstate highways “[w]e speed into narrowing vees of pines/where roadside boles flicker by like the years/as our future pulls apart from the past” and two-lane roads “pass through the hearts of timber trees”; a quick thought of the speaker’s father in years past riding in his outboard boat “plowing the new flood” surrounding Red Hill reminds him of Noah in his ark in the water covering the land, then finding Mt. Ararat.

Applewhite’s 1983 poem, “Road Down Home,” published in *Ploughshares*, is one of many travel poems that appear to seek to reconcile the two times/spaces of the poet’s life—his early years in and around the family farm in Wilson County and his adulthood in the neighborhood of Duke University and other “sophisticated” places. Back and forth he drives over the years; from the time he first went up to Duke as a freshman in 1954 right down to the present—in this alone, he might be called a “man-between.” “For six years, I had to operate the family tobacco farm in Wilson County to support my father here in Durham, in a nursing home. That experience is found in Section VII of *Selected [Poems]*,” he says.

But if one has a sensitive, intelligent consciousness like Applewhite, if one concerns himself with the nature and origin and destination of the individual consciousness (and, indeed, the entire racial consciousness) as he does, then these trips back and forth—down east and back to Durham, again and again, are really loci of work and thought in time. In 2006,

Applewhite told interviewer Katharine Walton that “. . . [T]ime and the human journey in it is my subject. . . . I used to get ideas while driving and write them out raggedly on a pad as I kept on going,” catching the fleeting metaphor, two or three confluent ideas—*confluent* being Eudora Welty’s word for freighted thoughts/feelings or mutualities that weave together and may become art.

A poet sees how two or more things are connected and exercises conciseness over language—another of Applewhite’s gifts, along with music. This poet is like his uncle in this regard—he wants to “save souls,” especially his own, by his writing. That means constructing a written order out of the chaos of ideas and feelings. As The University of Georgia Press wrote in 1985 describing Applewhite’s thesis in *Seas and Inland Journeys*: “The landscapes of the Romantic Poets and of their Modernist successors . . . are in essence acts of self-portraiture, attempts to represent in line and rhythm the consciousness of the poet as he wrestles with the chaos of the unconscious mind. Applewhite discovers dualistic patterns of imagery” [in their poems] . . . “that reflect the duality of the creative mind, the rational set amid the primeval tangle of the irrational. The landscapes of the Romantic and Modern poets are, in this way, points of origin for a psychological journey toward order and articulation, toward self-realization.”

And so when we read in his 1985 poem “Southern Voices” about “our land’s whole/Breath [that] stirs with its Indian Rivers” or that here “We suffer dumb drenchings/Of honeysuckle odor” that bring on memories too complex to identify in speech, watch out! We must understand, along with one critic who reviewed *Selected Poems*, that “Applewhite does not dally in provincial lullabies.” To paraphrase Applewhite’s “Last Night We Saw *South Pacific*,” collected in his *A Diary of Altered Light*, the same fire that burns the hydrangea from blue to lavender-brown in August will expand the sun in five billion years “to Venus and Mars, then end/planet Earth.” Mankind is the bit of matter that has to live well with this vertiginous knowledge: “We are the part of it that feels it,/thinks it, seeing this time in its slant/on bloom with our physical brains that/change it as they sense it.” We are the part that has to know about the fire that burns “as [we stand in the yard to] water the pink phlox.”

If landscapes are, then, points of origin for a psychological journey toward order and articulation, toward self-realization and reconciliation of our own bit of matter with the rest of it out there, Applewhite’s “Road Down Home” leaves us where this essay began—with the between-ness of driving from the Piedmont down east but also with the inescapable existential between-ness of what it means to be the creature/creator who senses, reflects upon, and expresses that. Here’s what this trip by night looks like, sounds like, and means to this poet: “Now passing through the hearts of timber trees./In a ditch, the circle of a clearing./Blue silhouetted with a cabin./Owl’s whoop staring. Stone moon.”

In addition to the Jean Stein Award in Poetry and the North Carolina Award in Literature, Prof. James William Applewhite and his works have been honored by the following: the 1979 Associated Writing Programs' Contemporary Poetry Award; the 2006 Roanoke-Chowan Award for Poetry for *Selected Poems*, North Carolina Literary and Historical Association; 1996 Election to the Fellowship of Southern Writers; a Guggenheim Fellowship; a National Endowment for the Arts grant; a citation in Harold Bloom's *Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (1994) and featured sections in V.S. Naipaul's *A Turn in the South* (1989) and Will Blythe's *To Hate Like This Is to Be Happy Forever* (2007); North Carolina Poetry Society Brockman-Campbell Awards in 1990 and 1998; and the 2001 Ragan-Rubin Award of the North Carolina English Teachers Association. James Applewhite was the 2007 Honoree of the North Carolina Writers Conference, meeting in Hillsborough.

In adding to Professor Applewhite's honors and awards by inducting him in 2008 to that august company of his peers, The North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame, the Committee notes and respects not only his life, his teaching, and his works of poetry and prose but also his ongoing curiosity about reality, as represented in his study of physics, mathematics, symbolic logic, metaphysics and philosophy, as well as aviation and astronomy. In reading his poetry, we see he is generous with this learning, a "translator" of post-Einsteinian science to those of us who stand and wonder at strange droughts, 500-year floods, and suburban sprawl. When our local lake dries up in June, he can look aloft and find that "... [T]he sky opens out, a lake of light/to slake my thirst" ("Geese by a Drying Lake," *SAQ* 103:1, winter 2004). A knowledge of science helps him "... understand how the world works on the most basic level. ... How [does] the mind interact with reality, in words and in mathematical equations? Physics and symbolic logic [don't] answer the questions, but sharpen them in enlightening ways. The intricacy of interaction between mind and nature is as relevant to a poet as to a scientist or philosopher. ... I see time and space as a language—like the taste of mint [or] the smell of cooking along a street at supertime."

Thus, for taking the long view of cosmic time and the nano-view of a drop of water on "leaf-tip," as well as for seeing much in between, James Applewhite, North Carolina's poet of Indian rivers and millennial light, one of our most excellent "seeker[s] in language," is deeply admired and truly welcomed to The North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame.

Invisible Fence

Will I ever write as freely again
as lost last year, rhyming when-
ever I breathed? This summer's wren

has raised her brood in the geranium:
identical pot, a different stem and bloom.
And I'm one year closer to the end of time.

We know God through her/his creation that is
a love of us, as in our love of these
fellow inhabitants of this time that changes

us as in a pane of light. We do not choose
to fade as we turn inside it and lose
hopes and images, see possibilities close.

Each day is a border where we walk
our belief and doubt—a path by a lake
where we note the crushed caterpillar, as clouds take
the needled heads of pines within their rays.

There the brown man with lighter daughter stays
while I tell him the fierce dog is harmless and he says

that he'll go another way, the Invisible Fence
not strong enough to trust at once.
I feel his smile touch both of us, and sense

the fraud of the made barrier, difference
of sex or of how it's practiced, of whence
we've come, the *when* of that elsewhere, the chance

of money, beauty, strength, intelligence,
poverty or ugliness, while soul intends its glance
through pupils in godly brilliance.

The years really take us *to* ourselves, medium
we walk in around the lake, in which we come
to love, smelling the houses at suppertime,

the aroma of baking ours. A neighbor who lost his
wife brought apples home to us—brought the mountains
he visited, in their August fragrantness.

I glimpse the whole perspective that I lack
but seek, and ask that hours, circling back,
remember their beginnings, for pure love's sake.

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WILLIAM S. POWELL

b. 1919

The Johnson County Heritage Center, in Smithfield, N.C., designates its William S. Powell Collection of 392 mementos and household articles from four generations of Powells, 1840-1920, as a gift from “the premier writer and compiler of North Carolina history.” The *Raleigh News & Observer* describes Professor Powell as a “living repository of information on all things North Carolinian.” UNC-TV publicity materials sent out before William S. Powell’s November 2007 interview by “Bookwatch” host D.G. Martin identify him as the “dean” of North Carolina historians.



Jamie Francis – The Durham Herald Sun

In its spring 2007 review of research by scholars at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, *Endeavors Magazine: N.C. A to Z*, Powell is “the Old North State’s preeminent historian,” and in yet another accolade, he’s inevitably “the guru of the history of our state.” If we asked, Bill Powell would no doubt have a witty, well structured, even-toned, and interesting account of the modern adoption and continuing usage of “guru” in popular American English.

Eighty-nine years old in 2008, Powell has a witty, interesting prose style that’s exhaustive, not exhausting, in its presentation of North Carolina’s history, geography, biographies, and places. Prof. Powell never “outgrew” his curiosity because all he describes, regardless of which of our four-plus centuries it centers in, is done with details and a sense of action—the term “Tar Heel,” the Rogallo Wing adapted by hang gliders on the Outer Banks, late eighteenth-century fundraising at UNC-CH, our hospitals and our opossums, the history of Caswell County, The Regulators, the “Meck Dec,” and much more.

Powell is the author of *North Carolina: A History* (1997) for general readers. His written work and lectures demonstrate deep respect for getting at the truth and setting it down for all to read, from fourth-graders and eighth-graders in his new Houghton Mifflin textbook series, through

the classic undergraduate text, *North Carolina Through Four Centuries* (1989), to citizen-readers and scholars of his three magisterial volumes: *The North Carolina Gazetteer* (1968), listing the names and founding dates, along with a short historical essay on every notable place in the state; and *The Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* (1979-1996), four thousand biographies in six volumes of those who have made and are still making significant contributions to North Carolina history. Powell worked on this project for twenty years. The third and most recent reference work is William Powell's edition, *Encyclopedia of North Carolina* (2006), at 1,328 pages the first single-volume explanation of the events, institutions, and cultural forces that have defined the state.

These three foundational publications are admired and imitated by scholars in other states, too, for their thoroughness, readability, and scope. In writing and compiling the *Encyclopedia*, the historian and his associate editor, Jay Mazzocchi, gathered 2,000 entries from 550 contributors—Powell and other scholars, librarians, journalists, and volunteer historians who wanted to do this work out of love and admiration for Powell and his vision—to publish a true “people’s encyclopedia of North Carolina.”

As of November 2007, the work has gone through two printings and its publisher, the University of North Carolina Press, is considering a third. But consider the challenging production of each copy of the *Encyclopedia*—the huge, 1,328-page book is nonetheless quite usable, a wonder of modern publishing technology with 399 appealing illustrations, tables, and maps.

Editor and historian Powell, who also has a degree in library science, responded to a question posed by host D.G. Martin on UNC-TV’s “Bookwatch” (November 16, 2007), “No, I won’t explain the true origin of the term ‘Tar Heel.’ Everybody asks me that,” the interviewer’s guest chuckled, “and now I can say ‘There’s a perfectly good book; you can look it up for yourself!’” Then, like a good historian, he went on to explicate the witticism: “I hope with these three different sources we have it all covered.” But William S. Powell is still adding to his own 112-item bibliography of books and articles on record in the library catalog at UNC. He’s continuing to write and collect facts and stories about North Carolina, sifting the lore from the truth with respect for both, because that is who he is, what he does, and what he’s been fascinated by since the age of three or four.

Born in 1919 in Smithfield, into the fourth generation of Powells in Johnston County, the boy learned to define and enjoy history by the age of three or four because at the close of each day, his grandmother asked, “How was your day, Bill? What did you do?” Then he would recount his exploits in the house, yard, and neighborhood, one by one—history at its most basic, “his story.” After moving with his parents to Statesville, in Iredell County, ten-year-old Bill was sitting with Civil War veterans out on the courthouse benches as they told stories of their experiences in battle. He soaked it all up and didn’t miss a thing.

“Later I learned that that was ‘oral history,’ which has come to be a

highly respected part of our field,” Powell says. “Now, I’m not a big fan of The Civil War—it caused great havoc here in the South and I’m sensible enough to see that it should have been settled by diplomacy before it ever got started. But I do respect the family pride of the descendants of those who fought. And the veterans’ stories that were written down are very valuable.”

William S. Powell attended Mitchell College for two years before transferring to UNC. After graduation in 1940, he served the military intelligence branch of the U.S. Army in the Pacific Theater during World War II. He earned degrees in history and library science, again from Chapel Hill, following that with one year’s work as a librarian at Yale University. In 1948 Powell became a full-time research historian at the North Carolina Department of Archives and History.

In 1952, Powell became assistant librarian at the North Carolina Collection at UNC and was promoted to curator in 1958, going on to help build the state’s premier research collection on N.C. history. By 1973 he was Professor of History at the university, teaching more than 6,000 students before retiring in 1986. However, it’s been a retirement only “on paper” for Bill Powell, when you consider the dates of publication (above) for major works he’s written, edited, and revised: several volumes of the *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* published after 1986; 1989; 1997; and most recently the *Encyclopedia*, published in 2006. To paraphrase E.B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web*: “Some retirement!”

At present, Prof. Powell is professor emeritus of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He lives in Chapel Hill with Virginia, his wife and fellow researcher. His honors include a 1985 Award by the North Caroliniana Society and a 2000 North Carolina Award for Literature. The books have won the following: *The North Carolina Gazetteer*, an Award of Merit, American Association for State and Local History; *North Carolina Through Four Centuries*, the 1989 Mayflower Cup for Nonfiction, given by the Society of Mayflower Descendants in the State of North Carolina; and the *Encyclopedia of North Carolina*, the 2007 Ragan Old North State Award, given by the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, the 2007 Award of Merit, from the American Association for State and Local History, and the 2007 *Choice* Outstanding Academic Title award, a major national award.

In adding to Professor Powell’s honors and awards by inducting him in 2008 to that august company of his peers, The North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame, the Committee notes and respects, of course, the thousands of hours of intelligent and devoted service his lifetime of work has and is adding to our knowledge of every aspect of life in our state. However, the Committee also honors the facts of his own biography as an important part of North Carolina history, and it honors the proof his happy countenance and droll wit offer that his career choice has been the perfect one for him; his prose style is contented and optimistic, evincing an author happy to share with a reader.

In every way possible William S. Powell has been a careful, thoughtful, wise, and humorous collector of facts and stories in his card files and a collector of objects and mementos that signify the past. Let it be noted that among the William S. Powell Collection at the Heritage Center in Smithfield are household objects consisting of baby high chairs (1840-1920) and Bill Powell's teddy bear (circa 1920). Thus, no fact of history is too insignificant, either for present-time analysis of meaning or future-time speculation and discovery of "old time." Thank you, Bill Powell, for the *Encyclopedia*, but thanks, too, for the teddy bear.

"BATTLE OF MOORE'S CREEK BRIDGE"

from North Carolina Through Four Centuries. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1989.

The Provincial Council drew upon every conceivable resource to deal with these threats. Although their efforts failed to meet all their needs, they did manage to send 760 men to South Carolina in December 1775 to join local troops in the "Snow Campaign" that crushed the Loyalists. Colonel Robert Howe and the Second North Carolina Continentals, as they were known by then, were sent to Virginia to help drive the royal governor, Lord Dunmore, out of Norfolk. And most encouraging of all, Colonel James Moore with the First North Carolina Continentals, supported by Colonel Richard Caswell and the militia from the New Bern district and Colonel Alexander Lillington with the Wilmington district militia, won an important victory over Scottish Loyalists at Moore's Creek Bridge early in 1776.

The Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge on 27 February 1776 has been called "the Lexington and Concord" of the South, and its significance certainly justifies the comparison. The battle undoubtedly kept the British from occupying the South at the very beginning of the war. From his shipboard cabin in the lower Cape Fear River, Josiah Martin never ceased his frantic scheme to restore royal authority in North Carolina. In the fall of 1775 he had sent a plan to London for the subjugation of the southern colonies. Royal advisers heartily approved his proposal and issued orders that it be implemented. Martin was to raise a force of Loyalists in the colony. Lord Charles Cornwallis with seven regiments of regulars would sail from Cork, Ireland, escorted by a powerful fleet under Sir Peter Parker; and Sir Henry Clinton, with two thousand more regulars, would sail from Boston to take command of the combined forces. A rendezvous was arranged to take place at Wilmington about mid-February 1776. This was an excellent plan, but it failed because the Loyalists were too eager and Cornwallis and Clinton were not eager enough.

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LEE SMITH

b. 1944



Roger Haile Photography, Mebane, NC

Horace Kephart and John C. Campbell, writing important books in the 1910s and 1920s about the Appalachian people they called “Southern Highlanders,” gave us a good term for Lee Smith’s characteristic figures in her twelve novels and three collections of short stories. They are feisty and independent, like Scots Highlanders, and turn to extreme expressions of love, anger, pride, and religion to infuse their lives of endless coal dust, mud, and poverty with spiritual meaning.

Smith loves these people, her people, and sends them forth as literary gifts, showing them with all their fierce loyalties, talents for “pretty work” like farming, common sense, “vilent” emotional honesty, humor, and above all, stubborn love and dignity. Mountain people are descended from families who were freedom-loving to begin with. Living away from flatland cities and small towns increased their fierce, generational hold on these lands apart, these lands above, inconvenient to common traffic—though not to natural beauty.

“Writing comes out of a life lived,” said Eastern Kentucky writer James Still (1906-2001), author of *River of Earth* (1940), the great novel of the Depression in that region. This novel depicts widespread illness and loss of life from black lung as well as the devastation of loss of work in the mines the Depression caused for mountain people already living poor before the Wall Street “Crash” on October 29, 1929. Lee Smith’s character Ivy Rowe explains: “When you go down in the mine so long, something happens in your head that you cannot imagine (sic) another life. It’s the only thing you know to do, the only way you know to live. You get scared of the mine and scared of everything else.”

A Kentucky poet laureate and influence on Lee Smith, James Still lived most of his life in a “two-story log cabin” in Knott County less than fifty miles as the crow flies from Smith’s hometown, Grundy, Virginia. In 1940, when *River of Earth* was published, the *New York Times* called it “a work of art,” and compared it favorably to John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).

James Still went on to say, in the same 1993 interview, "For me, ideas are hanging from limbs like pears, from fences like gourds. They rise up like birds from cover." And so it is for Lee Smith, who listened and incorporated true tales and anecdotes from life in Grundy into her novels. One of her novels is followed by a twelve-item bibliography of works she read in preparation: oral histories, collected tales, reminiscences, and recipes from the mountains. For forty years now, Smith has used what she knows and remembers of her older family members, mining their rambling tales and idiosyncratic Appalachian voices like any tons-a-day-producing coal miner, though she has also topped off each car of her coal train with gold from her own imagination.

During the writing of her fourth novel, *Oral History* (Putnam, 1983), another idea came to Smith. She found that the device of using first-person narrative gave her characters dignity and removed stiffness from the dialogue. "Now she had place, story, *and* voice," writes Jeanne McDonald in a 1998 article. "The voice that had been in her head, in her ears, on the tip of her tongue, for years. The rhythms of the native dialect came naturally to her." Since that breakthrough novel, the strength and confidence of her voice to express a full spectrum of thoughts, feelings, and perceptions has done nothing but grow. It includes male voices, too.

One of the best is the character of Russell Hurt in Lee's "contemporary novel," the *New York Times* bestseller *The Last Girls* (Algonquin Books, 2002). When Tuscaloosa artist Catherine Wilson first comes into the novel, and introduces her husband, Russell, the "girls" are, of course, expecting her to join them for a reunion cruise down the Mississippi to New Orleans, but "[t]his is not the husband they were expecting." Russell allows himself to be introduced, takes one look at the complementary "big orange stompers" with ice cream the girls are drinking around the table, and pronounces them "lethal-looking."

He wants his martini and walks over to the bar without another word. Put Russell in the camp of Lee's truth-tellers. Fighting his way through a prolonged mid-life crisis, he knows that some days all that saves him is watching the Weather Channel's reliable (and invariably buxom) "Weather girls'" extended forecasts. Smith's narrator says: "It's encouraging to think anything can be predicted five to seven days ahead, it gives him hope for the future, strength to carry on. The Weather Channel is what Russell has instead of prayer."

In William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* Smith found something else for her quilt of many colors: the use of multiple narrators, "though Faulkner's Deep South settings . . . were a world apart from Grundy's dark hills and poverty-ridden hollows." Yet "she brings to her characters a decency and dignity that makes them as credible as any memorable character" in Virginia Woolf or William Shakespeare—two other influences on her work, along with Eudora Welty's "Shower of Gold" and Flannery O'Connor's "Everything That Rises Must Converge."

Smith's main characters, even in *The Last Girls*, set in 1999, are truth-tellers, whether their truth comes from "taking up serpents" in a church up a hollow or passing out McGuffey readers in a classroom. Even primly honest ladies from Raleigh, North Carolina, or Boston, Massachusetts, are primly honest each in her own way.

So all abstractions in these novels come right out of the smallest details of life as it is lived, gathered by the author through close observation and listening from an early age. Her father, Ernest Smith, owned the dime store in Grundy, and Lee spent hours and hours there as a child, making up stories for each of the dolls; everyone in town and from out in the coves would come through the store to shop, and Lee observed and listened to them closely—one time even seeing a woman shoplift a radio under her coat.

All that listening taught Lee the fine lines between storytelling, embellishing, lying, and exaggerating, so that she can show her characters doing each at different times and be highly aware of what she's doing. McDonald says of this verbal craft, "One reason . . . Southern [readers] identify with Lee Smith is that she tells a story in the same convoluted way that they themselves do, using intimate asides, gossip digressions, and personal references, just as any friend would tell a story in ordinary conversation." Smith adds: "The way Southerners tell a story is really specific to the South. It's a whole narrative strategy, it's an approach. Every kind of information is imparted in the form of a story," even giving directions to someone driving through town.

As a reporter for small-town newspapers in Alabama and other places in the South after graduation from Hollins College in 1967, Smith learned valuable skills of reporting, interviewing, and recording oral histories. Also, she does thorough museum and library research to make details of the past come out of the dust into life again. If the author needs more information for a story, "she dives in headfirst. For background on *Family Linen* (1985), she took a job as a shampoo girl at a local beauty shop to learn firsthand how her characters' lives would play out." As a result, Smith's characters' voices speak in their own complete range of colors, shades, and tints, as though each were a line of paint chips from Home Depot.

Here is Lee Smith's most recent main character, Molly Petree, in *On Agate Hill* (Algonquin, 2006), born in 1859, in Charleston, South Carolina. Thirteen when the story opens, she writes in her diary up in the "hidey-hole" of a room she has discovered at the top of the ramshackle plantation house her mother and she took refuge in near Hillsborough, North Carolina. They were fleeing from the war down country. Like young Lee Smith peering unseen out of the glass window of her father's office down on the shoppers below, Molly can look out over the grounds of the neglected farm and see the adult characters act out their passions and losses. She can see strangers ride up and those she has come to love ride away out of her life for all time.

The preacher's wife, Mrs. Gwyn, has given her "this little diary" and bade her to begin with the words, "Thy will be done O Lord on Earth as it is in Heaven, Amen." Once she's alone up in her secret room, Molly writes: "Well, I have not done this! And I will not do it either no matter how much I love pretty Nora Gwyn who looks like a lady on a fancy plate. . . . NO for I mean to write in secrecy and stelh (sic) the truth as I see it. I know I am a spitfire and a burden. I do not care. My family is a dead family, and this is not my home, for I am a refugee girl. . . . I live in a house of ghosts. . . . I will write it down every true thing in black and white upon the page, for evil or good it is my own true life and I WILL have it. I will." Like Molly, Lee Smith's most memorable characters, as one reviewer wrote, are "sassy and insightful," and so the reader learns about them and from them entertainingly.

Molly is serious, too. Seeing herself to be "like the ruby-throated hummingbird that comes again and again to Fannie's red rosebush but lights down never for good and all, always flying on," the girl writes for us all, for as exiles and pilgrims on the earth, we make our way as best we can till journey's end. Like Molly's brother Willie, "born into a world of war," and Ivy Rowe's first baby, Joli, born just after her daddy died in the First World War, we are all born fast and too early. And how many families are ever "ready" for us? Squalling, we are placed in whatever's at hand—both Willie and Joli in their different novels in "a cradle of blankets in a dresser drawer set up between two chairs." And we live in fleeting thoughts—like the hummingbird beating its wings—until the time we are "gone off into thin air or the world of light," as Smith's greatest heroine, Ivy Rowe, says.

Only a few—like Thomas Wolfe and like the eminently gifted and hard-working Lee Smith—can capture these evanescent thoughts for others to read and to know them as their *own* thoughts "reading" back to them. Emily and Charlotte Brontë, Virginia Woolf, and Eudora Welty could write and think as feelingly, too, and Smith admires them as her mentors for that reason and for other reasons. They were born to write, and so was Lee Smith, as she recalls:

"I started telling stories as soon as I could talk—true stories and made-up stories, too. . . . Both my mama and my father were natural storytellers themselves. My mama—a home-ec teacher from the Eastern Shore of Virginia—was one of those Southern women who can—and did—make a story out of thin air, out of anything—a trip to the drugstore, something somebody said to her in the church. My father liked to drink a little and recite Kipling out loud. He came right from there [in Grundy, in Buchanan County], from a big mountain family of storytelling Democrats who would sit on the porch and place 25-dollar bets on which bird would fly first off a telephone wire. They were all big talkers.

"I got hooked on stories early, and as soon as I could write, I started writing them down. I wrote my first novel on my mother's stationery when I was eight. It featured . . . my two favorite people at that time: Adlai Stevenson and Jane Russell. In my novel, they fell in love and then went west together in a covered wagon. Once there, they became . . . Mormons! Even at that age, I was fixed upon glamour and flight, two themes I returned to again and again [in] high school, then college.

"Decades later, I'm still at it. Narrative is as necessary to me as breathing, as air. I write for the reason I've always done so: simply to survive. To make sense of my life. I never know what I think until I read what I've written. . . . No matter how painful it is, I intend to know what's going on. The writing itself is a source of strength for me, a way to make it through. . . .

"The story has always served this function, I believe, from the beginning of time. In the telling of it, we discover who we are, why we exist, what we should do. It brings order and delight. Its form is inherently pleasing and deeply satisfying to us. Because it has a beginning, a middle, and an end, it gives a recognizable shape to the muddle and chaos of our lives."

Ivy, the epistolary speaker of Smith's symphonic work *Fair and Tender Ladies* (1988), says she may be "ruint," but "Love rules the court, the camp, the grove, and men below and saints above. . . . And when I grow up and become a writter (sic), I will write of such a love and I will write of a man like my uncle Revel who can come like a storm in the nigt (sic) and knock a born lady off her feet."

Ivy doesn't become a writer—except for writing to you and me who "find" her pack of letters between the covers of Smith's seventh novel, the novel a *New York Times* reviewer called "[Smith's] most ambitious and most fully realized novel to date. . . . [I]terate, intelligent, insightful and entertaining." A *USA Today* reviewer added, "These beautiful letters . . . display Ivy's soul up close, the way a just-caught firefly illuminates a jar. So real does she become that it is hard to believe that Ivy did not actually live to write her letters." We will return to the lightning bug. And to the (Mason) jar.

Ivy tells her daughter Joli, living in Norfolk, just what she'd say to her if they were sitting on the porch breaking beans: "The first thing is, I did not raise you, nor any one of you, to be a quitter. For you take after me and Ethel and Beulah, who are spitfires as you know. Your hair is as red as ours was! Remember this, Joli—if you act like a rug, everybody is going to walk on you. . . . So, buck up. Here is some money from me and a check signed by Victor which is really from Ethel. . . . Get your self a new pair of

shoes. . . . But do not take any money from Taylor Three's mother at all, we will not be beholden to her in any way." Ivy talks plain, not just in standing up for women in their relationships with men. However, she knows she is conflicted in all her beliefs and feelings, and calls herself "a mess."

Being "a mess," however, is good! It's another term for being "a moralist." For true moral thinkers, those aware of favorite peri-millennial nouns "nuances" and "ambiguities," have to ask questions, lots of them, before they bring together critical judgment to decide and act. True moral thinkers have more troubles than the Supreme Court because at least those nine high judges have legal precedent to lean on for support. So, whereas scholars rightly praise Smith's work for its deft comic touches, its ability to depict the dignity of the rural mountain people of the Southern Highlands, its ability to show the subtle distinctions of class, and its seamless handling of multiple points of view, also important is that Lee Smith's main characters are moralists.

In fact, Smith is one of the truest and most entertaining moralists writing today and during the last forty years. Her characters suffer convincingly over what is best for them to think, feel, be, and do, beating themselves up pretty well with that branch of philosophy. Pregnant, Ivy Rowe weighs her moral conscience in a letter to her sister, her "soul," Silvaney, in 1917 when her boyfriend Lonnie goes off to war and asks her to marry him: "Lonnie is an orphan like Jane Eyre. Even though I remember so well what Mister Brown taught me and Molly so long ago, that truth is more precious than rubies, more dear than gold. But since that time I have learned a lot, believe you me, and now I wonder if Mrs. Brown had not been so honnest (sic) herself, if she had not told Mister Brown that she was pregnant with Revels baby, would he ever of found out that it wasn't his? For I cannot see how. And I wonder, Must we always tell the truth, even if it hurts another very much? So I bit my tonge (sic). For I thought, Lonnie is going to war, he does not need to feel bad [because I won't marry him]. I can tell him when he gets back, that will be plenty of time. Silvaney, do you think this is awful? It is either awful or grown up, I am not sure which."

These inner dialogues and vivid conversations give compelling drama, well-plotted tension, great highs and lows to Smith's stories and novels. She knows well how to keep them from falling over the "high cliff" into melodrama. In any case, the narrative geography is interesting, picturesque—and most helpful to every conflicted reader—from her first published novel in 1968, *The Last Day the Dogbushes Bloomed*, reprinted in 1994 by LSU Press in its distinguished Voices of the South series, until today, in 2008.

All of her books, from *Oral History* (1983) forward, bear reading and re-reading, with paragraphs blocked down the margins, lines underlined and starred, and pages dog-eared for remembrance and further thought. Because Ivy Rowe, for example, could be any one of us. As she ages, Ivy

says she “take[s] a real big view! Just remember that it is no reflection on *you*, and then forget it. . . . I did not think he was your kind anyway, Joli. I thought he made you nervous.” “Nervous” is good writing. “Nervous” is unexpected there. And “nervous” is *true* and perceptive. Because she is “a mess” and can see so many perspectives on things, Ivy guides her dearest daughter, her first-born child, to a better life. That better life is proof of Ivy’s moral truth.

Eventually, Joli becomes a famous novelist and again Ivy has strong opinions on what makes a good story: “Dear Joli,” Ivy writes, “Thank you for sending your book which I sat down and read in one sitting, it was pretty good although I think you could of used more of a love interest. Or may be that is just me! Anyway it was real good even if they do just think an awful lot. You might put some more plot in it next time, for an awful lot does happen in this world, it seems to me.”

Ivy displays the same spitfire-truth in scenes of a coal mine disaster where it’s plain the owners have been cutting corners in the interests of profits, in discussions of joining the union, in her hilarious and extreme actions to protect Sugar Fork from real-estate developers in the early 1970s, and in her helping to run a settlement school to educate poor children in the Southern Highlands of Southwest Virginia and Eastern Kentucky.

Lee Smith is a North Carolinian and has been since 1974, but her home country runs from Hindman and Hazard, Kentucky, east and northeast to Roanoke, Virginia. If she could go home again—and she agrees with another inductee to the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame, Thomas Wolfe, that (as Molly Petree might write it in her diary) “You CANNOT go home again”—it would be to a town centered almost in the middle of those Highlands, to Grundy, Virginia. Lee’s hometown on Rt. 460 sits in a valley “not ten miles from the Kentucky line.” Today, a new wooden sign, carved and painted, standing at the city limits, reads, “Welcome to Grundy, Home of Lee Smith, Leading Novelist of the New South.” And that is an apt epithet and distinction.

She was born there in 1944 to Ernest and Virginia Smith, part of the extended Smith-Dennis family that owned businesses in the town and took an interest in county Democratic politics. Ernest, like Ivy Rowe’s father, “always said he needed a mountain to rest his eyes against.” Virginia had friends coming and going in the house all the time, so from an early age, Lee heard their storytelling, too, and picked up the fun they took from their well accessorized conversations. Lee had her own little typewriter down at her father’s store for capturing talk, stories, and dialogue and a little house he built for her to write in out at the back of their property fronting the Levisa River. The Levisa, with its forks, streams, and waterfalls, runs through her mountain novels.

After coming to Chapel Hill with her first husband, poet James Seay, Lee Smith taught at Carolina Friends School, at UNC, in Duke University’s Evening College, and for nineteen years in the writing

program at N.C. State University. After leaving Carolina Friends in 1980, Smith taught writing part-time at UNC while she was raising her two young sons, Josh and Page Seay. Novelist and short-story writer Jill McCorkle was a student in Smith's first class and recalls that "[She] taught [me] that being from a small town wasn't such a disadvantage in writing. She told me all I had to do was to know and recognize everyday situations. She gave me an enormous amount of confidence and encouragement. She made you feel safe even when you were feeling shy about what you had written that week. She was broad minded and full of respect."

Imbued with a gift for research and a love of teaching, Lee Smith brings in relevant information to every class, lecture, and panel discussion she participates in, whether it be her creative-writing classes at UNC, Duke, or the English Department at NCSU, workshops far and wide, a benefit for the Orange County Literacy Council, a panel at the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival, or adult classes at the Hindman Settlement School in Kentucky. "Nothing is too demanding or exhausting for Smith. She is a woman who loves her work," and teaching, as an article in the March 2008 issue of *Our State* says, "is in her genes." Because Smith is unusually generous with her learning and intuitive sense of craft, many an audience member has found him- or herself casting about for a pencil stub when Lee Smith speaks/teaches, taking notes across the conference program or writing in concentric circles around the margins, needing to get it all down. And for good reason—her knowledge of writing and of life matters.

Since Smith's retirement from a formal university position in 2000, she continues to give workshops throughout the country. She recently participated in "Together We Read" in western North Carolina, a program linking people from all walks of life in reading the same book. They came together at one hundred sites in a mountainous, 21-county region to discuss a book, and Smith's *On Agate Hill* was the last book chosen.

She explains that "[t]hey filmed me in an Ashe County middle school workshop so they could show it in schools throughout the other counties. This is a fantastic chance to engage readers on every level." Her editor at Algonquin Books, Shannon Ravenel, a former classmate at Hollins College, says Smith loves to give back. "Lee is a first-rank literary citizen; she is so supportive of new writers."

And since 2000, Lee Smith has also written up a storm, publishing two excellent novels, *On Agate Hill* and *The Last Girls*. She and her columnist-, screenwriter-, and book reviewer-husband, Hal Crowther, the author himself of three highly regarded books in 1995, 2000, and 2005, own a cabin up in Ashe County, the northwestern-most county in North Carolina and part of the same upland range as the lower Blue Ridge in Southwestern Virginia where Grundy is located. They write there as well as at their summer house in Castine, Maine, where Hal likes to sail. Every year after Memorial Day, they box up their work and wear out FedEx by shipping it

all from Hillsborough, N.C., to Castine for the summer.

Another storm was brewing for Lee after 2000 as well. Family is important to her, and in 2003 her dear son Josh died. The sadness and grief that followed the young man's death from an enlarged heart overwhelmed his mother for a good while, though she finally hung onto her writing to pull her out of the emotional turbulence, like a woman in a hurricane. At the close of *On Agate Hill*, Molly Petree says, ". . . [W]riting is . . . a source of nourishment and strength. It cannot bring our loved ones back, but it can sometimes fix them in our fleeting memories as they were in life, and it can always help us make it through the night." And who is to say that the young Johnny Rowe, Ivy's little brother who, "they" say, is a jazz pianist down in New Orleans, does not carry the spirit of Josh Seay, a gifted musician. Literature, in some sense, fixes life—in a couple of ways; in this case, it fixes it in terms of "holding the image steady" so we can dog-ear the page and go back and read it again.

Lee Marshall Smith is the author of twelve novels and three collections of short stories. Her work has been made into the musical drama "Good Ol' Girls," and there are three one-woman shows that dramatize her fiction, centering on her characters Ivy Rowe and Molly Petree, plus the characters from the musical drama. She has written several articles and has a helpful, interesting website, www.leesmith.com. She and Hal have two children, Page and Amity, and three grandchildren.

Smith's honors and awards are many. A selected few are: the \$3,000 award of the Reader's Digest College Association for her senior thesis at Hollins, published as her first novel, *The Last Day the Dogbushes Bloomed* (1968); 1979 and 1981 O. Henry Awards; the 1984 North Carolina Award for Literature; the John Dos Passos Award for Literature (1987); two Sir Walter Raleigh Awards of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association (1983 and 1989); a Lyndhurst Grant (1990-92); the Robert Penn Warren Prize for Fiction (1991); and a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Award, which gave her a generous financial stipend and a three-year sabbatical to write and teach. She chose to affiliate for that period with the Hindman Settlement School, where James Still worked as the librarian in 1932. Smith is also the winner of an Academy Award in Literature, presented by the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York in May of 1999. In 2002, *The Last Girls* won a Southern Book Critics Circle Award.

In adding to Lee Smith's honors and awards by inducting her in 2008 to that august company of her peers, The North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame, the committee duly notes her genetic gift for writing whereby she says she "writes novels in longhand the way other people keep a journal"; her fortunate "place"-ment in a family, a town, a county, and a people that prize storytelling and love to talk to one another; her ability to learn well, to study, to do research, to interview others, and then to get it down on the page like spots of light in a dark forest; and most of all, for her fertile, transmuting imagination, by grace, that has allowed her to be a maker of

rich, everlasting stories for her adopted state of North Carolina and beyond.

Lee Smith, as a final gift, we give you back, in another context here, Ivy Rowe's crowd of lightning bugs in a genuine Mason jar, not the puny, single "just-caught firefly" in a (plain glass) jar *USA Today* awarded Ivy. Near the end of the novel, Ivy's young daughter Maudy and her friend have caught lightning bugs and made a "lantern," setting it down on the front porch of Oakley and Ivy's cabin before going in to bed.

Ivy rests out there a while from her day, picks up the lantern, and "writes" to her loving sister Silvaney: "It glowed and moved and changed, it was always glowing and always changing, right there in my hands. I will tell you quite frankly, Silvaney—Joli has broken my heart. For she is the child of my childhood, and in losing her, I have lost my youth. I cannot say it better than that. I wanted her gone, I wished her godspeed, but now I am about to die because she has took me up on it! Oh, I am contrary. It is true! She has traveled far beyond me now. . . .

"That lightning bug lantern reminded me so much of Joli—not Maudy, never Maudy, who is a girl like a 100-watt bulb. I sat and held the lantern in my hands, listening to the owls, watching it glow, and change, and glow, and change. Like all of us. This thought came to me all of a sudden. . . .

"So I sat out on the porch in the pulsing light of the lamp and after a while I started getting sleepy. But before I went back to bed, I unscrewed the lid of the jar and dumped the lightning bugs out on the porch. At first they kind of crawled around as if they did not want to go anyplace. But then they seemed to figure things out and they rose up together like a little blinking cloud—up, up, and out across the yard and up into the trees until they were out of sight."

The forgotten speechwriter who coined the now-overworked phrase "a thousand points of light" in January 1989, just months after Putnam's publication of "Ivy Rowe's book," *Fair and Tender Ladies*, could well have been thinking of Lee Smith, clearly a "point of light" herself. Smith has given her readers the lightning-bug lantern to carry along—and so much other light besides.

"IT WAS THE WRITING OF THEM, THAT SIGNIFIED"
from Fair & Tender Ladies. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1988

My dear Joli,

I know I am worrying you by staying up here by myself. I am sorry for it honey, but I can't do nothing else. It will not do you any good to try and hire anybody either, I will just run them off the way I run off Martha, and I love Martha. But there does come a time when a person has got to be by themselves. May be you

will understand this, and may be you will not, when you get to my time of life. I know it is hard for you now, caught up as you are in the great roiling churn of things, to consider any other way to be. But it comes to us all, honey. It comes to us all.

Joli, you ask about the letters.

I don't know if I can explain this to you or not. I will try, though. Because you are a writer, I will try. I know that your aunt Silvaney died in the Elizabeth Masters Home in the great flu epidemic that took so many lives. Of course I know it! I am not a fool. I have been knowing it ever since Victor came home from the war and went over there and found out about her death. I got so mad at him I liked to have died, for telling me! I did not want to know it then. For it didn't matter. Silvaney, you see, was a part of me, my other side, my other half, my heart.

So I went on and wrote her letters, all the years. I put them in the cedar chest which is where Marlene and Maudy found them.

And you know what I have done with those letters now?

I gathered them up and took them out back to the firepit, where we used to lay the kettle to boil our clothes when I was a girl, it taken me several trips as I move so slow now. I cleared out the snow in the firepit and took my big old kitchen matches out there and burned the letters every one. Now and then I would stop and look all around, but you know how quiet the land lies in the snow. And it all looks different. The shape of Pilgrim Knob looked different, and Bethel Mountain down below hung in wreathy mist, and even the slope of the orchard looked different, strange and new. I don't know—it was kindly exciting! It was a new world, with even the shape of it changed. The clouds hung low and dark and puffy. My breath hung in the air. The smoke from the burning letters rose and was lost in the clouds. It took me upwards of an hour to burn them all. With every one I burned, my soul grew lighter, lighter, as if it rose too with the smoke. And I was not even cold, long as I'd been out there. For I came to understand something in that moment, Joli, which I had never understood in all these years.

The letters didn't mean anything.

Not to the dead girl Silvaney, of course—nor to me.

Nor had they ever.

It was the writing of them, that signified.

So now I have sent them up in smoke and given the cedar chest to Maureen for a hope chest (I hope she will not grow up to be Miss America!) and I remain forevermore your loving,

Mama.

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North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame

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